



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE RELIGION OF ISRAEL TO SAMUEL

REV. L. W. BATTEN, PH.D., S. T. D.
New York City

There is nothing improbable in the general trend of the story in the Bible that some nomad clans from Canaan, or the desert to the south, wandered into Egypt, and were there gradually impressed into the service of the king. When we pass to the story of the exodus under the leadership of Moses, and the conquest and settlement of Palestine, we are on sure historic ground, and accordingly have good historic documents.

The nomads who found their way into Egypt certainly carried a religion along with them, but we have little direct information about its character. The stories of the patriarchs were written long after the events described, and the religion portrayed is that of the author's day. Whether it was also the religion of the nomads themselves is a matter about which nothing positive can be said.

It does appear, however, that the religion of the sojourners in Egypt changed or decayed; for it was manifestly a part of the programme of Moses to restore pre-existing conditions. The constant appeal to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shows his conservative purpose. Nevertheless a religious restoration is never complete. The course of divine events is always forward; and a backward course can only be seeming under the leadership of such a great man of God as Moses. As we know the religion of Israel, and as it is important for us, it starts with Moses. From that point onward its development can be traced, and there is a certain continuity. A great deal of the writings once attributed to Moses comes from a far later age. Some of the institutions ascribed to him belong rather to the period of the Babylonian exile. But that Moses communed with Jehovah on the lonely heights of Mt. Sinai is beyond question; and the result of those communings is written eternally in the Hebrew and in the Christian religions.

But we must not look upon Moses as chiefly concerned with the

preparation of a system of religion; for his purpose was rather political than ecclesiastical. His system of religion came from the fixed idea that God was all in all, and that there could be no good political life except as it was intertwined with a sound religious life. Moses inculcated three things: (1) the idea that the people should worship Jehovah; (2) that they should recognize obligations to each other, so as to form a proper social fabric; (3) and that the basis of it all was found in right moral conceptions. The religion of Moses was ethical rather than ceremonial.

The great religious work of Moses was the establishment of the worship of Jehovah as the God of the Hebrews. Whence Moses himself obtained this cult is another matter. It is held by many today, that Jehovah was the Kenite God, and that his worship came to Moses through his marriage with the daughter of Jethro, a Kenite priest of Jehovah. What we know is this: two of the historical sources of the Pentateuch, the Ephraimite (E) and the Priest Code,¹ represent Jehovah as a God previously unknown to Israel or to Moses, while the other source, the Judean (J), carries back the worship of Jehovah to the beginning of history. It seems clear that Jehovah was not worshiped in Egypt, and that Moses first set that cult upon enduring foundations. There was much apostasy and idolatry at various times in Israel; but from the time of Moses to the present day the Hebrew people have never ceased to recognize Jehovah as their God.

It is one thing, however, for a great leader to promulgate a religious system far in advance of the conditions of his age; it is quite another for that system to become the actual use of the people. The stories of Moses' time bear abundant testimony to the rebellion of the people against the principles taught by him. Therefore it is probable that the religion of Israel in the period between Moses and Samuel, the period of the conquest and settlement of Palestine, represents a development of the old religion, modified gradually as it absorbed something of the spirit of the great leader.

For this period we are not reduced to conjecture altogether, but have some ancient and positive testimony. To that we shall now turn in detail.

¹ E in Ex. 3:13 ff.; P in Ex. 6:2 ff.

The oldest source available, probably the earliest literature in the Bible, is the Song of Deborah (Judg., chap. 5). This song is nearly contemporary with the great battle it celebrates. We must see what light it throws upon the religion of the time.

In this poem we note that Jehovah is the national God. It is to his standard that the tribes are to rally. He is praised for the victory, not Baal, or any other deity (vs. 11). The enemies of Israel are his enemies (vs. 31). There we see the fruit of Moses' teaching in the generation directly following him. Jehovah therefore is the leader in a righteous war, and the victory is a tribute to his power. Jehovah came to the succor of his oppressed people (vss. 4 f., 13); and Meroz, which probably aided and abetted the enemy, is blamed because they "came not to the help of Jehovah."

When Jehovah moved, the natural world was affected. The earth trembled, the mountains quaked, the heavens dropped, the clouds poured out water, the rivers were flooded, even the stars² in their courses joined in the great battle (vss. 4 f., 20 f). Jehovah is praised because the people responded to the call of the prophetess (vss. 1 f., 9). The divine will operated upon the hearts of men to lead them to their perilous duty. But this will exercised no constraining influence; many of the tribes felt it and responded; others did not respond, either because they did not recognize the call of the prophetess as the command of Jehovah, or because they chose to disregard the summons.

It is a striking fact that in this poem it is conceived to be the clear duty of each separate tribe to join in a common national interest. Those who took part in the campaign, which was to serve the interest of the whole people, were the tribes most nearly affected, viz., those bordering on the great plain which was the prize fought for. These tribes were Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, and Issachar; and they are praised for their conduct. The tribes which took no part in the struggle, Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher, were the ones more remote from the scene of battle. But their situation is not an excuse for their inaction. The nation was in danger, and it

² There is no reference here to an astronomical cult; nor do the stars refer to the angelic hosts. The meaning is simply that all the forces of nature were arrayed on the side of Jehovah.

was the duty of all tribes, whether immediately affected or not, to come forward. That demand is especially interesting because from the first chapter of Judges, it appears that the initial steps in the conquest of Canaan were taken by the different tribes, for the most part acting independently, according to the separate interests of each one. The story in Joshua, chaps. 1-12, describing the conquest as the work of all the tribes as acting in a body, reveals a later point of view, in which what was, and what should have been, are confused. But, however far it is from historic fact, it certainly represents an early ideal. This great poet had a conception of a national obligation which superseded the local interests.

In the Song of Deborah we have so far found rather highly developed religious conceptions. But the ideal falls far short of loving one's enemies. The deed of Jael was not as treacherous as we might infer from the account in Judg. 4:17 ff.; but Jael did strike down a fugitive, who stopped at her door for needed refreshment. The writer, however, knows no pity for an enemy, and so we find a glorification of Jael's blow, which by its relative length shows the sentiment of the author. Still more is this lack of pity disclosed in the touching picture at Sisera's home, where the warrior's mother waits anxiously for the return of her son, trying to invent reasons for the unexpected delay and endeavoring to find consolation in the ingenious suggestions of her attendants.

From the fact that in this poem Jehovah is regarded as the leader of wars, and that a similar conception is found frequently elsewhere in these early times, it has been held that Jehovah was worshiped originally as the war-God. There are two considerations which tell against this theory. First, a people are likely to look to their god for what they need at any particular time. The early age of Israel was an age of war. This was the period when the tribes secured a foothold in Canaan, and then made incessant attacks upon the inhabitants until they had destroyed or absorbed them. If they looked to Jehovah for help, therefore, it would be for help in war. Their God was a God of war, not because that was his special sphere of action, but because that was their special need at the moment.

In the second place, whether we trace back the origin of Jehovah-worship among the Hebrews to the patriarchs, or as is more probably

correct, to Moses only, there is nothing suggestive of the war-God. The patriarchs were not warriors, and the mission of Moses was not military, but diplomatic. He was to secure the release of the Hebrews by strategy, not by battle. His teaching about Jehovah showed him to be the leader of the whole national life, not merely in war.³ Some of the people thought that Canaan could be secured by a quick attack in war; Moses knew that it could only be acquired by years of training. The suggestion therefore that Israel worshiped Jehovah in time of war and the Baalim in time of peace⁴ has no support in fact.

It might seem that the author of this poem believed not only that Jehovah governed the world, but the universe as well, since not only mountains and clouds, but the stars also, moved in sympathy with him. But such an inference is hardly warranted. The Romans believed that Neptune controlled the sea, but Neptune was a national deity. Likewise the idea of Jehovah in this poem and in this age does not go beyond a nationalistic conception. The enemies of the Hebrews are the enemies of Jehovah because they were foreigners and strangers. So Jephthah said Chemosh had given the Moabites their land as Jehovah had given the Hebrews theirs. The notion sometime prevalent among Christians that the heathen have no part nor lot in our God is not far removed from this early Hebrew theology.

The fact must not be overlooked that the Song of Deborah was the production of one of the rarest geniuses of this period. Such a man not only exercises the greatest literary power, but also is inspired with the loftiest conceptions. For it takes great ideas, even more than a facile pen, to make a poet. It is very likely that the religious ideas of this song were far above those held by the people at large. We have, however, material which shows religion as practiced among the common people. To a case of that kind we shall now proceed.

The story of the sanctuary of Micah and the migration of Dan "is one of the most valuable illustrations of the ancient religious

³ In the Amalekite war (Ex., chap. 17) Moses appeared to be surprised that the Hebrews were victorious only while he held up his hand in prayer—for that is what the story means. That would not have been the case if he had been introducing a Mars to Israel.

⁴ Todd, *Politics and Religion in Ancient Israel*, p. 86.

practices of the Hebrews which the Old Testament contains."⁵ Micah was an Ephraimite living in the hill country. With some money which Micah had stolen from his mother, and which a troubled conscience constrained him to restore, a carved and a molten image were made. This was conscience money, and hence was appropriately set apart for sacred use. Then Micah set up a sanctuary, placed his images⁶ in it, made an ephod and teraphim (household images), and instituted one of his sons as priest. Some time afterward a wandering Levite came along, and Micah hired him to be priest. The Levite served Micah until the migrating tribe of Dan plundered Micah's shrine, and induced him to accompany them as priest of the tribe.

In this record we have the first clear evidence of the Levitical priesthood. It was not yet, nor indeed for centuries later, an offense for a layman to serve as priest. Micah installed his son in that office, as David long afterward made his sons priests (II Sam. 8:18). But even in this very early period⁷ a Levite was considered a priest of a superior order; for Micah eagerly displaces his son to make room for the Levite. Moreover, his expression, "Now I know that Jehovah will prosper me, since I have a Levite as my priest" (17:13), shows conclusively his high valuation of his new priest. The Danites were anxious to secure his services for their tribe. They undoubtedly had priests of their own, but the Levite either displaced them, or became their chief. Dan was in all later times a famous sanctuary. Probably its later reputation was due to the cult established by this Levite.

It is clear that the Levitical priesthood was a regularly established order, and was generally recognized as such. The moment the Levite appears, Micah is quick to see his value. The Levites had some peculiarity in their ministrations by which they were easily recognized. When the Danite scouts came near the house of Micah,

⁵ Kent, *Beginnings of Hebrew History*, p. 300.

⁶ These images were small affairs. From the amount of silver in them they would together weigh less than ten pounds avoirdupois.

⁷ This story takes us back to a period earlier than most of the stories of the heroes in Judges. The migration of Dan seems to have taken place in the generation after Joshua (Josh. 19:47). The whole character of the narrative indicates that the story is nearly as old as the events described.

we are told that they knew the voice of the young man, the Levite (18:3). This may be translated, "recognized the sound (or tones) of the Levite." It can scarcely mean that they personally identified his voice as that of a former acquaintance, for the Levite was from Bethlehem-judah. It can only mean therefore that the Levite had some peculiar way of chanting or singing in his religious exercises, which made it possible for anyone to identify his office, just as the high churchman may be recognized by his intoning.

The members of this order were evidently very few. Had there been an ampler supply, the Danites would have had Levitical priests already, and Micah would have been less distressed if he could easily have secured another. Nevertheless, the Levites had no settled way of living. This one left his home in Bethlehem because conditions of life were too hard there. He wandered over the country a good while before he chanced upon Micah, and was then glad to give his services for his board, a new suit of clothes, and ten shekels (about six dollars) each year (17:10).

The use of images and ephod were no offense to the priest;⁸ in fact they were the implements of his office, and were probably regarded by him as essential. The principal duty of this priest was to make inquiries of Jehovah, for this Levite recognized no other God. He may have offered sacrifices, although there is no mention of an altar. The scouts of Dan sought him to ascertain from Jehovah whether or not their quest for a suitable tribal possession would be successful. Doubtless Micah found the chief value of his priest in his ability always to know that his undertakings were under the favorable auspices of Jehovah.

The ancient record has preserved the name and genealogy of this Levite priest; his name was Jonathan, and he was the grandson of Moses.⁹ The grandson of the great priest, prophet, and statesman used the ephod and images without scruple. We must suppose a rapid deterioration after Moses' time, even in his own family,

⁸ So Gideon made an ephod of gold out of the booty taken in war, and set it up in his shrine at Ophrah. But Gideon doubtless inquired of Jehovah by this ephod, and had no idea that he was idolatrous.

⁹ The late editors of the Hebrew text inserted a small letter into the name, and so changed Moses into *Manasseh*, names which differ in the Hebrew unpunctuated text only by the letter . . . Moses is the original name.

or else the religion practiced by Moses was very different from what has generally been supposed.

We find here the Levitical priesthood established in the line of Moses. Moses is called a Levite, and in that case the term is understood to mean a tribal connection. In our passage the term denotes an office. The tribe of Levi, which was once noted for its fierce warlike spirit (Gen. 49:5), has disappeared; and the name survives as that of a gentle and peaceful office.

There are other stories of a primitive type, and in substance at least coming from a very early period. The stories of Gideon and of Samson reveal the belief in theophanies, a belief supposed also to be held by the patriarchs, and filling a larger place in legends about them than in any other part of the Bible. The belief in the theophany is very likely a survival from the early times; at all events it passed away with the period which we are studying.

Gideon was in the winepress, beating out wheat, when the angel or messenger of Jehovah appeared to him.¹⁰ There is no distinction drawn in these stories between Jehovah and his angel. Later on in the narrative Gideon's visitor is called Jehovah (6:14). Gideon asks a sign "that it is thou who art talking with me" (vs. 17). What Gideon wanted was proof that the one who gave him a mission was divine, and so had authority to commission him to rid the land of the Midianites, and power to aid effectively one of the humblest families of one of the poorest clans in Manasseh. The sign or proof was forthcoming when Gideon brought meat and bread and broth, either for an offering or for the hospitable entertainment of the guest; for the angel touched the food, which had been laid upon a rock, with his staff, when a fire came from the rock and consumed it, the angel at the same time disappearing from sight.¹¹

Gideon was satisfied from his sign that he had been visited by an angel of Jehovah. At once another emotion seized him: he was frightened, as Manoah was under like circumstances; for he had seen the angel of Jehovah face to face, and that in the conviction of

¹⁰ The theophany is found in the earliest source, the sign of the fleece in the later.

¹¹ Similarly the angel of Jehovah who visited Manoah and his wife, promising them a son, disappeared. It is expressly stated in this case that the angel ascended in the flame (Judg. 13:20); perhaps that is implied in the case of the angel who visited Gideon. There are many points of resemblance between the two theophanies.

the people meant death to the beholder. This idea of the danger to one who beheld Jehovah or his angel survived at least until Isaiah's time, and was held by the most enlightened of all the prophets (Isa. 6:5).

Sacred places of many different kinds were believed in at this time. In Judg. 4:5 we have a picture of Deborah sitting under the palm tree while she gave forth her oracles. Barton is doubtless right in his contention that the inspiration of the prophetess was furthered by the sacredness of the tree.¹² The sacredness of a place had its origin in some event which happened there, the event always being one involving some manifestation of God. Gideon named the place of the theophany Jehovah-shalom, and doubtless it was afterward regarded as a place peculiarly favorable for divine manifestations. The spring which Samson found and named En-hakkore (the spring of the suppliant), was known long after (Judg. 15:19). It is likely that those who visited the spring or drank of its waters felt unusual confidence that God would hear their prayers. The threshing-floor of Araunah became the site of the temple altar because there Jehovah stayed the plague which had been devastating the land of the Hebrews.

Among the religious conceptions of a people we look with especial interest for their idea of the future life. It is well known that in Hebrew literature there is a great paucity of information on this subject. Nevertheless it happens that for the period we are considering we have some very specific knowledge. This is based on the narrative of Saul's visit to the witch of En-dor (I Sam., chap. 28). The story carries us to the last night of Saul's life; but the profession of necromancy had been suppressed by Saul, and therefore had doubtless been quite prevalent in the time before Samuel. What belief we find in this narrative may legitimately be carried much further back.

When Samuel is brought up to confront the doomed king he complains first that his repose has been disturbed.¹³ Hence we

¹² *Sketch of Semitic Origins*, p. 89.

¹³ I am not concerned here with questions of actual occurrence, e. g., whether the spirit of Samuel, or his bodily form, since he still wore the prophetic garb, really appeared at the woman's bidding, but only with the belief of the people. In religion many beliefs have been far removed from facts.

infer that the condition of the dead was essentially one of rest. The dead remember the events of the past, for Samuel tells Saul that Jehovah had carried out the seer's forecast. The characteristics of this life survive in the future world. He who had read the future could read it still, and so Samuel predicts for the unhappy king the disaster that will befall him on the morrow. The abode of the dead is veritably the underworld, for Samuel rises from the earth. In that region there are no distinctions of place for good and bad. Saul would be slain as a punishment for his sins, but his final abode would be with Samuel. Death itself was regarded as a sufficient penalty. The spirit of the prophet, however, was not visible to Saul, but only to the woman who served as a medium. It appears though that Saul heard Samuel's words directly, or at least thought he did.

Human sacrifice was not considered unlawful, and was deemed the most efficacious appeal to God a man could make. Jephthah did not know that his sacrifice would be his daughter; but he purposely put his vow in such terms that Jehovah should choose his own victim. For that is the meaning of the warrior's words: "if thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hand, whosoever¹⁴ cometh forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I come in peace it shall be Jehovah's, and I will offer it as a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:30 f.). Jehovah chose the victor's only child, and bitter as it was for him, for in spite of his rough character Jephthah loved his daughter, he complied with the terms of his vow. The story of Abraham's purpose to offer Isaac was intended to combat this practice.

We may note also in this incident the binding force of the vow. Jephthah does not seem to have thought of his child when he made the vow. Jehovah was therefore demanding a larger price than he had intended to pay. But the terms of the agreement demanded the sacrifice, and he does not withhold it. So Hannah gave up her only son in accordance with the vow made before he was born.

¹⁴ It is vain to render, as even the Revised Version does, "whatsoever," a rendering which the Hebrew will scarcely allow. The words show that Jephthah meant a person. A thing would not come forth from his house to meet him. It is vain also to try to evade the conclusion that a human sacrifice was made. The language used admits of no other construction.

The most attractive picture of religion which comes from this era is found at the very end of it, and the chief actors in the scene are Samuel's parents. At this time Shiloh was the principal sanctuary, at least in the hill country of Ephraim. Elkanah was a pious Ephraimite, and in the discharge of his religious duties went from his home once a year to worship and to offer sacrifice at the shrine. The sacrifice, however, was not an offering primarily to God, but was essentially a family meal. The priests received certain portions for their use, but the greater part was eaten by him who offered it. This religious rite was a family rather than an individual affair. Elkanah took with him on his annual pilgrimage his two wives and all his children.

Hannah was the favorite wife, but she was barren, a condition considered a great misfortune by the Hebrews, and deemed a result of divine interference. We are expressly told that Jehovah had shut up Hannah's womb. Therefore Jehovah alone could make it possible for her to bear a child.¹⁵ Hannah retires from the sacrificial feast to the sanctuary and there engages in silent prayer, her lips moving, but no words being uttered. This was so unaccustomed a mode of praying that Eli thought she had been drunken. From this instance, though, we infer that it was quite a usual thing for private prayers to be offered in the temple, and also that unhappily unfortunate results often followed the feasting. The priest exercised no function of foresight, but only comforted the woman, and prayed that God would see fit to grant her petition, and give her the son she had asked, and which she had vowed to Jehovah.

Hannah vows that if a man child be born of her, he should be given to Jehovah all his life, and that no razor should ever come upon his head. That is, he should belong to the order of the Nazirites, the ascetics of the Hebrew religion. Samson was also a Nazirite. The two essential requirements of the order were that the hair should not be cut and that the devotees should practice total abstinence.¹⁶

The most nearly universal religious rite in this time was circumcision. Just what significance was attached to the rite in the early days is not clear. But unquestionably it was considered a religious

¹⁵ Note also the cases of Sarah, Manoh's wife, and Elizabeth.

¹⁶ Cf. Judg. 13:4 f., and Amos 2:12.

observance. As a national institution, in the sense of an institution generally observed by all the people, circumcision had its origin soon after the invasion of Canaan. The older version of the story says that all the Israelites were circumcised with knives of flint at Gibeah Araloth (hill of the foreskins), in order to take away the reproach of Egypt: that is, so that the Egyptians could no longer disdain them as an uncircumcised and unclean people. A later writer has made this event the resumption of a custom which had fallen into abeyance in the wilderness. There is no evidence, however, that this rite was generally practiced before this time. We find but one other reference to circumcision until we come to the time of David, and that is in the story of Samson (Judg. 14:3; 15:18). But David's scorn of the uncircumcised Philistine shows that the institution had been so long established in Israel that the Hebrews looked upon such a condition as a reproach. The contemptuous phrase "uncircumcised Philistine" may have been put into David's mouth, as well as into Samson's and his parents', by a later writer. But there is no reason to doubt that circumcision was generally practiced by the Hebrews in this age.

There were many other features in the religion of early Israel. There were various festivals, as the Sabbath, New Moon, Passover, and perhaps a Harvest Festival. There was a generally accepted scheme of sacrifices. But these things we know chiefly from inference; there is no direct authority to which we can appeal. I have, therefore, preferred to discuss those features of the religion of early Israel which are most surely supported by evidence easily ascertainable and readily understood by any faithful student of the Holy Scriptures.